

ELECTRONIC RECORDS DESTRUCTION

Electronic records may be [destroyed](#) only in accordance with a Library of Virginia–approved Records Retention and Disposition Schedule. In addition, custodians of records must ensure that information in confidential or privacy-protected records is protected from unauthorized disclosure. "Deletion" of confidential or privacy-protected information in computer files or other electronic storage media is not acceptable. When a record is "deleted," only the index to the record is actually destroyed instead of the document itself. To be effectively disposed of, electronic records must be overwritten with meaningless data, also known as "electronic shredding," or the storage media on which the records are housed must be physically destroyed. **All** copies of a record (electronic or otherwise) that have reached the end of their retention periods must also be destroyed, including copies on backup tapes and in off-site storage. As with all aspects of electronic records, electronic records destruction necessitates good communication between records managers and information technology personnel.

Methods of Destruction

Digital Shredding

Digital shredding is a viable, in-house electronic records destruction method that uses software erasure programs to overwrite files with meaningless data. Limitations of this method include the following:

- Defective hard drives cannot be erased.
- There is no way to ensure visibly that erasure has been successful.
- It is a time-consuming process and subject to human error.
- Erasure tools require upgrades.

Degaussing

This method of destruction involves equipment that applies a strong magnetic field to magnetic media that erases all recorded data. As storage devices are typically degaussed one at a time at the rate of one minute per device, degaussing is a much more time-effective destruction method than digital shredding. Limitations of this method include the following:

- There is no way to ensure visibly that degaussing has been successful.

- Equipment creates large magnetic fields that may damage other surrounding devices.
- Different types of media require magnetic fields of varying strengths.
- Degaussing only works on magnetic media, not optical media.

Physical destruction of storage media

Often the most popular method of destroying electronic records is to erase or delete the data from the tape, disk, or other storage medium so that it can be reused. Software exists, however, that can extract deleted data even after it has been overwritten. For confidential or proprietary records, the safest method of destruction is to destroy the physical media itself. Depending on the volume of storage media to be destroyed, agencies may want to use outside vendors.

Limitations of this method include the following:

- Shipping records to outside and off-site vendors creates possible security problems.
- Shredded equipment may be difficult to dispose of as it may be considered environmentally controlled waste.

The best option for an agency might also be a combination of two destruction methods.

To find out more about appropriate methods of destruction for electronic records, see VITA's [Removal of Commonwealth Data from Electronic Media Standard](#) and [data removal information](#).

For more information regarding the legal disposition of electronic records, see [§42.1-86.1 of the Virginia Public Records Act](#) and Regulations Governing the Destruction of Public Records Containing Social Security Numbers, 17 VAC 15-120.